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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000891

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2018

TAGS: PREL PTER XF AL

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED ON TERRORIST BROADCASTING TO  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

REF: STATE 68256

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) On August 1, the Ambassador discussed reftel demarche on ARABSAT with senior GOT MFA officials. While agreeing with the broad goal of stopping extremist broadcasts, MFA officials recommended that the US Government widen its efforts to include a political solution, for example by seeking an agreement at the United Nations to address the problem. The Ambassador noted that the USG was raising the issue with other appropriate countries, not just Tunisia. The officials said that Tunisia is not a member of the ARABSAT board of directors, although there is a ground station here. The MFA interlocutors agreed to consider the question of a point of contact. End Summary.

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Pursuing an International Approach  
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¶2. (C) On August 1, Ambassador conveyed US concern about extremist broadcasts to the Foreign Minister's Chief of Staff Mahmoud Khemiri, the Minister's Chef de Mission Mehrez Ben Rhouma and other MFA officials. Khemiri and his colleagues suggested that the US might want to use a multilateral approach to address the problem, floating the idea of an agreement at the United Nations. He asked if the same demarche had been delivered to other countries in the region and what their response had been.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador indicated that the demarche had been delivered in other countries and the United States had discussed the issue of such broadcasts often in some capitals. He noted that the US would appreciate a point of contact in the GOT on the issue, preferably a contact that could respond quickly and authoritatively. If possible, the US would appreciate a technical-level contact as well as one at the MFA.

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Al-Jazeera on the Hook  
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¶4. (C) Agreeing in principle with the need to curb terrorist organizations' use of media channels, Khemiri highlighted how al-Jazeera often broadcasts material from Ossama Bin Laden and al-Qaida. Khemiri likened al-Jazeera to channels such as al-Manar, and he repeatedly highlighted how preventing terrorist organizations from using broadcast media is a process that requires a broader coalition. Khemiri expressed how Tunisia had also been a victim of attacks by a broadcast

network, specifically al-Jazeera, which has transmitted unacceptable statements and claims about Tunisia. The Ambassador agreed that the GOT had been subject to threats by extremists, notably by AQIM. He added, however, that the USG also draws a line between groups advocating or threatening violence, which is unacceptable, and those engaged in legitimate political debate.

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It's not me, it's them  
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¶15. (C) Ben Rhouma confirmed to the Ambassador that Tunisia is not a member of the Board at ARABSAT. He highlighted that Tunisia is only a recipient of the broadcast material and does not influence or have a say in the content. Khemiri emphasized that Tunisia is not a decision maker in the content broadcast via ARABSAT and suggested the US follow up with more influential players.

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Comment and Request  
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¶16. (C) Although the MFA officials agreed to consider whether to provide promised to provide a point of contact on this issue, we consider it unlikely that they will respond quickly or that any person who is designated will be in a position to respond substantively to inquiries. It is more likely that we will continue to work through senior MFA officials on this issue, as we have in the past. Post would appreciate additional information on the US approach to this challenge that could be passed to the MFA. End Comment.

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